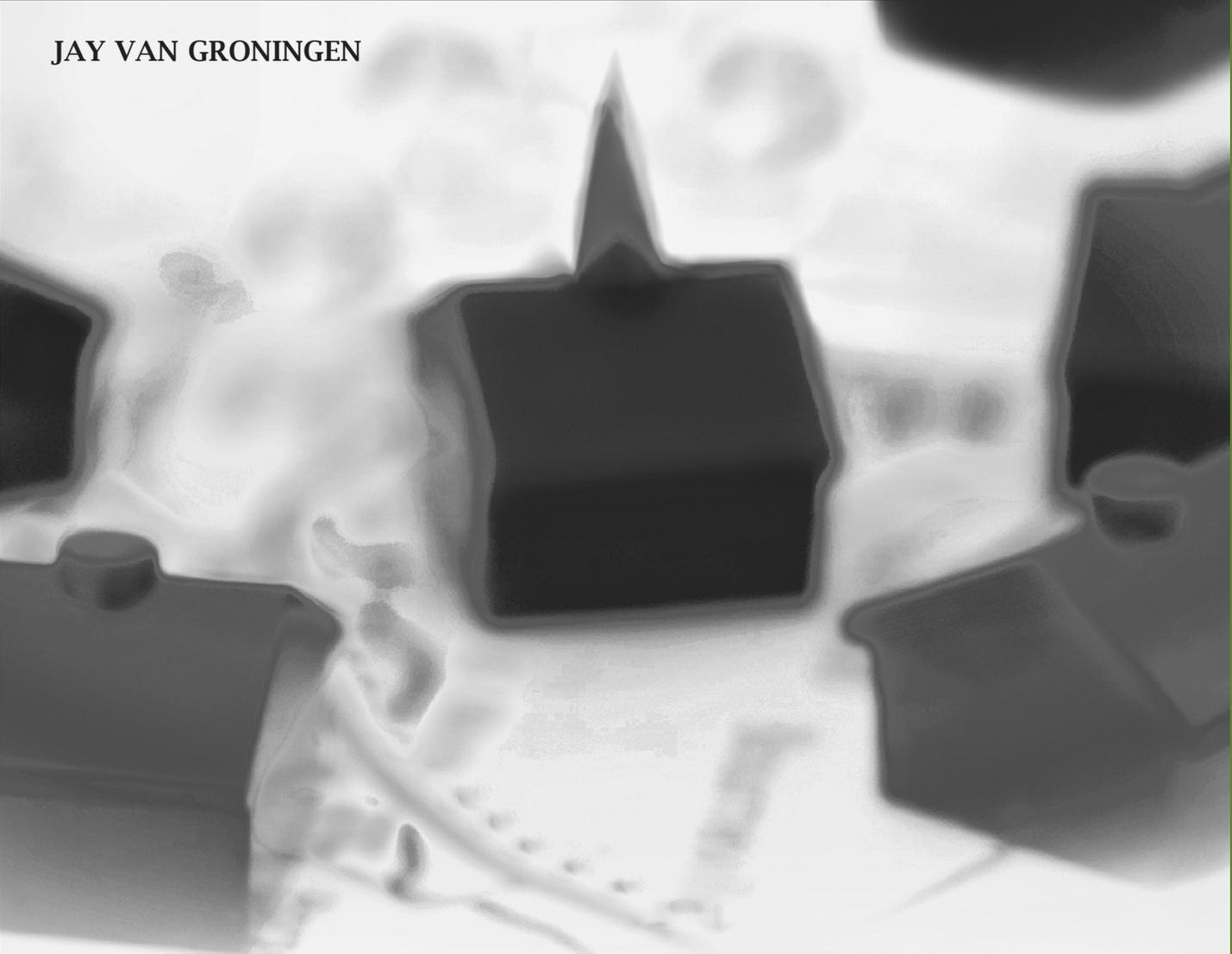


**THROUGH GOD'S EYES, WITH GOD'S HEART**  
BUILDING READINESS FOR COMMUNITY MINISTRY

JAY VAN GRONINGEN



**COMMUNITIES  
FIRST**

WORKBOOK 2

**Through God’s Eyes, with God’s Heart**  
**Building Readiness for Community Ministry**

**Table of Contents**

1. Church and Community .....	3
2. Developing a Baseline .....	4
3. Assessing the Landscape.....	7
4. Discerning the Church’s Role (Mission) in Community Change .....	13
5. Navigating Forward.....	13
6. Evaluation .....	14



## 1. Church and Community

Few churches, if any, would say they aren't interested in sharing God's heart for their community or in seeing their community through God's eyes. However, like many aspects of ministry today, this is more easily said than done. Most churches have few tools, training, or resources to assist them in fulfilling this critical mission. This workbook provides those tools and resources that will help you imagine your community the way God sees it, and help you respond to it as Jesus would. These tools will help you engage with your community in exciting and life-giving ways.

Three existing approaches for a church's community ministry are outlined in the introduction of the *Communities First* book:

Ministry *in*

Ministry *to*

Ministry *with*

### **Ministry *in*:**

When a church implements a ministry in a community, it chooses the programs and services it will offer based solely on what members want to do for themselves and possibly for the community. The church gathers little or no input from the community about the choice of programs and services and where these services should be provided. Most often these ministry programs are short-term and do not address long-term community needs. Most of the activities take place at the church. The measure of success in this approach to community ministry is the number of people who sign up and participate in the program or event.

### **Ministry *to*:**

This is a variation of the "ministry *in*" approach. The location may not be the church, but as with the previous approach, little or no input is gathered from the community as to the type and content of programs or services provided. The program is taken to the community, but as with the "ministry *in*" approach, it does not reflect any community participation in the planning and it tends to be a short-term rather than a long-term response to community needs. The measure of success in this approach is the number of people who participate in the program or event and the church's capacity to implement programs outside of its own building.

### **Ministry *with*:**

Ministry *with* the community starts by gathering input and information from members of the community. This information is used to determine which programs and services the church can offer to make a long-term impact. Ongoing evaluation and input from community members participating in the programs is expected. The location can be any appropriate venue in the community, depending on purpose and input gathered from community members. The measure of success in this approach includes what happens to participants in the program, the impact on the community as a whole, and what happens in the process of working together as a community.

Which model best describes *your* church's approach to community ministry?

## 2. Developing a Baseline

### Where are we now in engaging our community?

The exercises and tools that follow are designed to help a church develop an accurate perception of the church's current community ministry efforts. This is an important step in developing readiness for community ministry.

#### Exercise 1

Use the following assessment tool with church leaders and groups to find a common understanding of the current ministry environment.

##### *Readiness assessment*

1. Currently, our church's community ministry
  - responds to needs of members.
  - responds to needs of community residents who ask for help.
  - refers community members to other agencies.
  - has a method for analyzing needs, developing helping plans, and walking through change with families requesting help.
  - adds new ministries based on what church members want to do.
  - adds new ministries based on what the community asks us to do.
  - adds new ministries based on a coordinated community plan.
  - addresses community and congregational needs in partnership with agencies and other churches.

2. Our greatest successes in community ministry are...

---

---

---

3. Our greatest challenges are...

- we have not considered helping people who are not members
- we don't know how to connect with people who need help
- our effort to help people is often abused
- we can provide only short-term solutions
- the people we help don't seem to connect with our church
- community needs are overwhelming
- we aren't equipped to met the needs of people outside our church
- \_\_\_\_\_

---

4. Our church's vision for community ministry is
  - to see members live fruitful lives.
  - to see lives transformed (members and community).
  - to see people and churches working cooperatively to make life better for individuals.
  - to see the community itself become a better place to live (better services, improved environment, etc).
  - to make improvements in community life—how people interact and live together in the community.
  - to recognize and unleash all gifts in the community for the benefit of the community.
  - to improve the systems that affect us all so that life is fair and just for everyone.
  
5. What do you need to make this vision a reality? (Check all that apply)
  - help understanding the “hidden rules of poverty”
  - a clearer understanding of community needs and assets
  - a new model for community outreach and need-based ministry
  - more effective strategies for community ministry and engagement
  - better understanding of relational community ministry that crosses cultural and economic barriers
  - better understanding of how to engage with other churches and institutions in the community.
  - how to create a shared plan for community change that develops with stakeholder participation
  - other \_\_\_\_\_

## Exercise 2

Create a narrative history of your church's ministry with your community. Use the following questions to guide a conversation about your church's history of community engagement. Gather a group of people from your church (as many as possible), including staff, leadership (council, consistory or board members), outreach committees or team members, and anyone responsible for and involved with community ministry now or in the past. Divide into groups of three to four people and choose a recorder for each group.

1. This church experienced the greatest growth during \_\_\_\_\_ (insert years). This growth occurred as a result of ...? What was happening at the time?
2. Tell brief stories that complete this sentence: This church was at her best in community ministry and engagement when...
3. The most successful ministry we did in/with the community was... What was successful about it? What did people do, and what were the results?
4. Church members who make the most difference in this community are...? What are they doing and what are the results?
5. The greatest energy and drive for community ministry in this church has come from...? Who were they and what did they do?

6. Create a word picture to describe your church's history in outreach and community ministry, i.e. Our church has been like: a lonely flag pole in front of the court house; yeast in the dough etc.

**Resources for a narrative history**

Bullard, George. *Spiritual Strategic Journey: A Tutorial for Congregational Redevelopment*.  
([www.congregationalresources.org/bullard.asp](http://www.congregationalresources.org/bullard.asp))

### 3. Assessing the Landscape

#### **Introduction to Community Asset Mapping: Who are the people in your neighborhood?**

Everything in this world belongs to God. He is the creator; the sustainer of all things. There is nothing in a community that does not belong to God. When God's people begin to realize how rich they are with assets; with time, talents, and resources, they can begin to imagine great changes in their communities. Churches exist in asset-rich communities!

With volunteers from your church, walk through and investigate your neighborhood. Walking through the neighborhood will give you a very different perspective than if you were quickly driving by on your way to or from church. As you explore the area, use your imaginations. Imagine the potential that exists for this community to be a preferred community - a great place to be and live for everyone in the area. Imagine the relationships that can be formed and the work that can be done to make the community better.

Look at and catalogue the assets, or the already-existing strengths in the neighborhood. Think about how these strengths can be built upon as you pray and think about your ministry in the community.

Assets can be:

- Individuals, unassociated groupings of people, people who are associated with each other
- Institutions, businesses, government, organizations
- Knowledge, skills, or abilities
- Facilities, funds, or products

#### **Group Exercises**

##### **Exercise 1**

Using a map of your neighborhood (it is helpful to have both a street map and an aerial map), determine some boundaries (a target area) of your community. It may help to answer this question, "What are the natural boundaries for our church to target for interaction and relationships?" Discuss your answers and then draw the perceived boundaries on the map. These can be adjusted later based on conversations and your experience mapping the neighborhood. Try not to bite off more than you can chew—a manageable area will initially extend a few blocks around the church.

Once you have decided on the "loose" boundaries of your target community, divide your group into twos and determine a walking route for each group. If there is a business district or prominent feature in the neighborhood, draw the routes so that each group can walk by it. Hand out the walking routes to an appointed navigator.

Read "Seeing Your Community with Fresh Eyes" together (below), and give some examples. Each person should have a journal or small notepad to record observations and document experiences. Remind everyone to be sensitive to the perspectives of community members.

Walking around the neighborhood with clipboards can be viewed as intrusive, so be polite and attentive to your neighbors. Usually, people are eager to answer share their impressions of the neighborhood.

When you return, in small groups, draw a map on flip chart paper. On the map, record what you saw and how you interpret it as a potential for ministry. Begin by having people talk about the different things they saw as they draw them on the map. The group can create its own legend for their map: churches = crosses, signs = blue squares, street vendor = umbrellas, etc. After you have drawn in your observations, begin to interpret your map as a potential for ministry or relationship building. Remember to focus on the positive assets and relationships in the neighborhood. The tendency is for people to see only the negative and lose sight of the big picture. Where one person might see a rusting BBQ grill in a messy front yard, another sees a place where neighbors gather.

Each group should describe its map to the larger group and discuss it together in terms of the potential for relationship building, ministry, assets, etc. Designate someone to record ideas and insights. The larger group should then debrief the process to identify how it worked for them, how you might communicate your findings to others in the church or community, or how to improve the process.

This exercise will yield the greatest fruit when it is done over and over in a neighborhood. Some church groups are doing it weekly!

The value of asset-mapping comes from:

- Seeing all things in a community that can be used in some way to make life better for everyone.
- Getting to know the people and realizing what wonderful, gifted creatures they are. Imagine how they can participate in making life better for everyone in this community.
- Connecting assets with needs in the neighborhood. Community walkers can start connecting people in wonderful exchanges of neighborly love and the community gets better for everyone.

### **Seeing Your Community with Fresh Eyes**

- Structures: What are the building types, usages, condition, changes in use, style, or materials? Who is leaving, who is replacing them, what's happening?
- Pieces of Life: What artifacts do people leave around? What's on the front porches? Are they ethnically or culturally specific? What values can you predict people have? What are the local businesses offering as far as products or services? Are they local or chain stores? What do the prices say about the customers? Where are people traveling to or from in the community? Where are the hubs of activity?
- Signage: What is being sold on billboards? Who are outside companies marketing to? What language is used? Who is the target audience? What is being sold by business owners and

landowners, for how much? What bumper stickers do you read? What do signs say about the community's political or religious values?

- **Space:** How is land being used? What are the "natural" boundaries of the neighborhood: rivers, hills, freeways, streets, railroad tracks, buildings, and scrap yards? Do you know when you have left the neighborhood? Look at how personal space is treated. Where are cars parked? What are yards used for? Where are the fences? What is public space and what is private space? What does this say about neighborhood values?
- **Sounds and Smells:** What music is being played? What age or group does it cater to? Are there different patterns of language? What do you smell? What do the smells tell you about different parts of the neighborhood?
- **Signs of Hope:** Keep an eye out for evidence of God's people at work. They could be your future partners and key resource people. Look for the presence of churches and nonprofits. Look for the small "mustard seeds" of the kingdom and for what God is already doing in the neighborhood.

## **Exercise 2**

### **Community Interview**

Surveys and interviews are another helpful way to learn about your community. A good survey can be difficult to develop and administer, but interviews with members of the community can yield a wealth of information. As a group, brainstorm and compile a list of community groups and institutions you may interview. Good choices would include neighborhood association directors or organizers, school principals, local business owners, and leaders of any prominent civic groups. In addition to these, you will want to interview residents around your location to gain a broad perspective.

The important thing for this exercise is to listen. Listen for clues that will point you to community assets and existing needs. No more than two people should go out to interview together, so as not to overwhelm those being interviewed. Below are some sample questions you may want to use in this process.

#### *Sample Questions:*

1. How would you describe our community today?
2. What I love most about living in this community is...?
3. What do you believe is our community's greatest asset?
4. This community will be stronger, better when...?
5. I would want to stay in this community for a long time if...?
6. What is the community's greatest challenge?

- 7. What are the best sources of help for meeting community challenges?
- 8. If I could wave a magic wand to make this community better, the one change I would make is...

See Resources section for sources of additional questions.

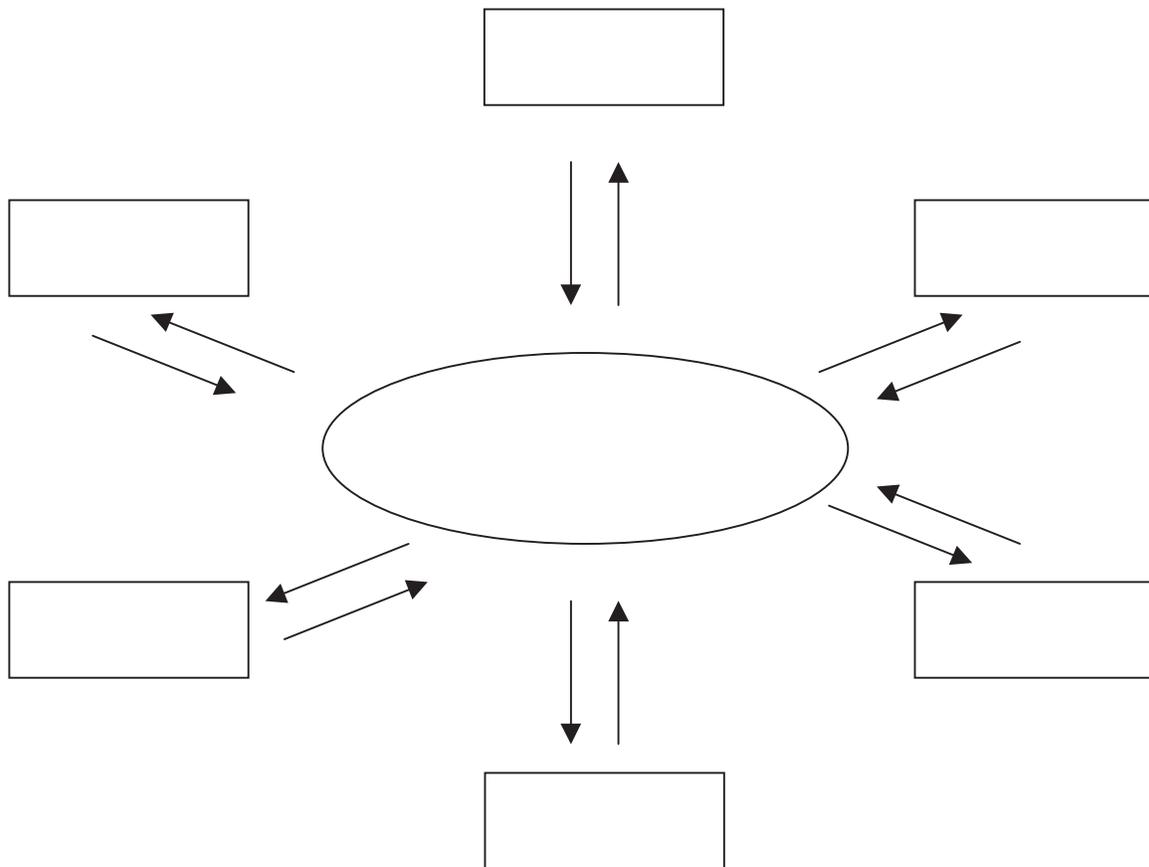
**Exercise 3**

**Building Relationships with Your Neighbors**

Using the information gathered from Exercise One, we will start to talk about the different types of assets in your community (individuals, associations, and institutions being the three main types) and how a church can find connections to them.

The Process:

- 1. Using a flip chart, draw a diagram that looks similar to the following:



2. In the center, write the name of your organization, congregation, or group. In each box write the name of a group or individual you identified in your neighborhood: Stepping Stones Daycare, Mitchell Street Block Club, Paul the ice-cream vendor, etc.
3. Next to each arrow pointing away from the circle, write the assets your group offers to that institution, association or person. Next to the arrows pointing toward the center, write the assets that are offered to your group. For example, if the group in the box is a daycare, your group might offer some volunteers, nursery toys, or customers to the neighborhood daycare. The daycare may be able to supply childcare at special church functions and expertise or knowledge in early childhood development.
4. After your chart is complete, talk about the ways different groups or individuals might connect through or around your group. What would the community look or feel like if these different residents used all of their gifts and skills to help one another?

In the real world, making these connections is harder than drawing them on a piece of paper. As a group, discuss ways you might build bridges between these different groups. Where does your group have existing, healthy relationships? How might your group start to enter into the life of the neighborhood? What are the barriers your group may need to overcome in order to do this?

## **Doing and Sharing the Work**

Someone, such as a staff person, volunteer, or task group, will need to turn the mass of information and insights from “assessing the landscape” into usable information and concrete action steps.

### **Using the information**

Schedule a time when walkers, interviewers, asset-mappers, and other volunteers can come together. Help them organize their information into these categories:

1. Information about assets already available in the community.
2. Information about needs in the community.
3. Ideas and vision statements from members and neighbors about things that will make life better in the community.

Develop a process that helps the whole group to arrive at consensus about:

1. one or two big, long-term changes you might work on together.
2. specific programs that would help individuals and families develop new skills.
3. how to share the information with the community and develop accountability to them for planned changes.

Use the results of this process to create a community “scorecard” of things the church and community will work on together during the next 12 months. Print it up and distribute it in the neighborhood and to all church members. Make sure that you invite the community’s participation in all of the work to be done. Include a specific invitation for them to volunteer their gifts and resources. Provide church leadership as needed to move each item on the scorecard ahead, utilizing all community assets as appropriate.

Here are some additional ideas to get church and community members to begin dialoguing and acting on the information.

1. Develop a timeline for completing each item on the scorecard.
2. Find other redundant but creative ways to communicate the scorecard to the wider congregation and the broader community, and to invite their contributions.
3. Update the scorecard annually using a similar set of listening and recording processes and make semi-annual progress reports throughout the community.
4. Develop the beginnings of community partnerships with other churches and nonprofits and utilize all community assets to achieve the goals on the scorecard.

## **Demographic Data**

Demographic data can also tell a church and community a lot about itself. This data can come from a variety of sources including the census data gathered by the government. There are several sources for gathering this data. Some are listed below.

Percept: <http://www.perceptnet.com/>

Census web site American Fact Finder:

[http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

Ethnic Harvest: <http://www.ethnicarvest.org/>

## **Additional resources for Asset-Based Community Development**

Rans, Susan and Altman, Hilary. (2002) *Asset Based Strategies for Faith Communities: A Community Building Workbook*. The Asset Based Community Development Institute.

McKnight, John L, Kretzmann, John P. and Turner, Nicol. *A Guide To Mapping and Mobilizing the Associations in Local Neighborhoods*.

For more information on Asset Based Community Development trainings and workshops see the following link: <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>

#### 4. Discerning the Church's Role (Mission) in Community Change

Just because there is agreement for change between the community and the congregation does not mean it is the role of the church to make all of the changes. Some things are better done by groups other than the church.

A few things for a church to consider:

1. Does your church have a passion for the things on the scorecard—a sense of calling to get them done?
2. Does your church have the gifts needed to get the job done?
3. Is the congregation willing to pay the cost (financial, human, institutional) to get the job done?
4. Is the work compatible with the mission of the church in the community?
5. Might it be the role of the church to organize the community to advocate for another group or institution to do get something done (like the city or township)?

Most congregations are very resourceful. Gifts and leadership may come from individuals, small groups, or committees that already exist in your congregation.

A spiritual gifts inventory can help a church begin the process of discovering particular gifts of leadership, skills, interests, and passions that members may be willing to offer.

#### 5. Navigating Forward

What the church and community want to do together may be stated in a scorecard, but getting the work done will require a plan.

The core elements of a plan for each item on the scorecard must answer these questions.

- Who Who are the leader? Who are the workers?
- What What specifically do they need to do to complete the task?
- When What is the schedule for getting the task done?
- Where Where is the work going to take place?
- How How will the task be done?

Using a grid similar to the example below, develop a plan for implementation of each item of your scorecard.

Who	
What	
When	
Where	
How	

## 6. Evaluation

Evaluation is a critical ongoing step in developing effective community ministry. Building an evaluative process into your ministry plan is an important component for sustainable implementation. Critical questions to ask include: This task will be successful when...? Steps we should track and report to the community include...? Results we want to measure include...? How will we gather feedback from those affected by this task?

Begin by developing two types of evaluations: **internal review** and **participant feedback**. Evaluation does not have to be an overwhelming process. It is simply a matter of gathering feedback from those involved in the ministry. It means listening to those who serve as well as those being served.

### Resources

Schwarz, Christian. (1996) *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*. Church Smart Resources.

Snow, Luther K. (2004) *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*. Alban Institute.

Mallory, Susan. *The Equipping Church: Serving Together to Transform Lives*. Zondervan Press.

Mallory, Susan and Smith, Brad. (2001) *The Equipping Church Guidebook*. Zondervan Press.

Carroll, Jackson W., Dudley, Carl S., McKinney, William, eds. (1986) *Handbook for Congregational Studies*. Abingdon Press.

# THROUGH GOD'S EYES, WITH GOD'S HEART

## BUILDING READINESS FOR COMMUNITY MINISTRY

This workbook will help you see your neighborhood through a God-lens. You will learn how to:

- Assess your church's approach to community ministry
- Inventory your church's current involvement
- Celebrate your church's past successes
- Map your neighborhood
- Interview your community
- Develop a plan for your church

This book is part of the *Communities First* series, designed to help churches and Christians bring unique gifts to their neighborhoods and communities. Combined with consultation, these materials will help you engage with your community and influence it in ways that will make life better for everyone here and now. As a result, you will see your community respond and change in surprising and redemptive ways. The Church and God's Kingdom will grow.

In addition to the cornerstone book simply titled *Communities First*, other workbooks include:

*The Theology of Development: A Biblical Understanding of Christian Mission and Community Development*

*Through God's Eyes, With God's Heart: Building Readiness for Community Ministry*

*Meeting Needs: Moving from Relief to Individual Development*

*Case Management: Creating a Plan for Change through Covenantal Commitment*

*Developing a Community Vision*

*Community Strengthening*

*Community Organizing*

*Justice: Creating Policies, Laws and Systems that Work for Everyone*



Center on  
FAITH IN COMMUNITIES



CRWRC

CHRISTIAN REFORMED  
WORLD RELIEF COMMITTEE

*Living Justice, Loving Mercy*